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ABSTRACT

This document describes an interdisciplinary English and history course on women and work in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is designed for 11th and 12th grade students and it includes ideas suitable for use with college bound or vocationally oriented students. A major objective of the course is to help students analyze their ideas on work and job stereotyping so that they will combat traditional limitations placed on women in the work force. The unit begins by presenting sources of statistics for describing the current earnings gap between men and women. Then suggestions are given for student assignments on analyzing the portrayal of women in television. Much of the unit is devoted to an analysis of the middle class ideal of a lady as contrasted with the real life of women exhibited through occupational types: houseworker/motherworker, farmworker laborer, frontier builder, industrial worker, plantation mistress, slave, teacher, lawyer, and doctor. The unit concludes with a section on women and the law. Teachers are encouraged to have students read about sexist legal decisions and about workers' civil rights. These are used as an introduction to a discussion on the Equal Rights Amendment. This course description suggests many appropriate books for each of the themes in the unit. (Author/BC)

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WOMEN AND WORK IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA:

A COURSE FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

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WOMEN AND WORK IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA:

A COURSE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The focus of this interdisciplinary English and history course is women and work in nineteenth and twentieth century America. Designed for 11th and 12th grade students, this course includes selections suitable for both college-bound and vocationally oriented students. The purpose of the course is twofold: 1) to supplement the paucity of material on women and work in traditional high school texts; 2) to help students analyze their ideas on work and on job stereotyping so that they will be able to combat traditional limitations placed on women in the work force. This course includes material on black women. The last section of the course is designed to indicate a few of the legal methods available to combat sex discrimination at work.

WOMEN AND WORK will begin with the presentation of statistics on the current earnings gap between men and women. These figures are available from several sources: "The Earnings Gap Between Men and Women," 1976, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Women's Bureau, Washington, D. C. 20210; Laurily Keir Epstein, Women in the Professions (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books/D. C. Heath Co., 1975); and Larry E. Suter and Herman P. Miller, "Income Differences between Men and Career Women," in Changing Women in a Changing Society edited by Joan Huber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Heidi Hartman, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," in Women and the Workplace, edited by Martha Blaxall and Barbara Reagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). This section of statistics will conclude with

discussion of Martha Griffith's "Can We Still Afford Occupational Segregation? Some Remarks" in Blaxall and Reagan, Women and the Workplace.

Because television has generally portrayed women as nitwits incapable of holding down a paid job, student assignments at this time will be to analyze the images of women in the media. Students might be asked to write character analyses (I use the term loosely) of women appearing in a series of programs on TV. The class will then discuss the reasons behind advertisers' portrayals of women as idiots running around the kitchen and the bathroom with a can of Lysol poised for instant spraying in case a germ appears. Are there generalizations that can be drawn from movie portrayals of women? Are changes taking place now? If so, what are they? What are the occupations of women in elementary school readers in both stories and pictures? How many women are pictured wearing aprons? Are there any black women? Are high-school texts in sociology and psychology sexist in approach? Using magazines found in their homes, students might make collages showing the occupations of men and women. They should compare occupations of black women and white women, and they should specify the magazines that they are using. Students might review Morgan's Total Woman and point out that the "total woman" image is middle class, white, non-working outside the home. With correct camera,lenses, and tripod, the teacher can make her own 35 mm. slides showing these feminine images: "the lady" from famous paintings; "the vamp" from recent books showing women in films over the years (e.g., Myth America). The list of possibilities is long.

After students have examined slides showing images of the "lady" from nineteenth-century paintings, we will move to an analysis of the middle-class ideal of "lady" as contrasted with the "real life" of women exhibited through the occupational types which will be our units for discussion: Houseworker/Motherworker; Farm Laborer; Frontier Builder; Industrial Worker; Plantation Mistress; Slave; Professional Woman--Teacher, Lawyer, Doctor.

We will begin discussion of the feminine ideal with Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood" in Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976). From the feminine ideal we will move to the "Houseworker/Motherworker" section, read Lerner's introductory essay in her book The Female Experience on the status of the housewife, and proceed to selections from the nineteenth-century writers in the "Just a Housewife" section of Lerner's The Female Experience: An American Documentary (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1977). From Lerner, we will move to a glorification of housework in Catherine Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy (New York: Schocken Books, 1977; reprint of 1841 ed.) However, at the same time that she glorifies housework, Beecher demands efficiency in home design and in fact pushes her own designs, which are an improvement over older plans. Since Lerner in her introductory essay explains both Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, we will read Gilman's Women and the Economy and contrast it with Beecher's attitude. Next, we will read Amy Lowell's "Patterns" and discuss the difficulty of breaking with tradition. As the culmination of the unit, we will read Kate Chopin's The Awakening. Discussion will center around the "awakening" of the desire to work, to create, to be someone other than wife, mistress, or mother.

The second section on nineteenth-century working women will center around "Farm Laborer" and "Frontier Builder." After analyzing and writing about family diaries, letters, histories--in the tradition of Roots, students will read Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Letters of a Woman Homesteader (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961). Stewart exemplifies the hardy woman on the frontier. From the homesteader, we will move to farm women protecting another farm woman who, they believe, has probably murdered her cruel husband when he destroyed the one bit of beauty in her otherwise bleak existence. This play is Glaspell's Trifles, included here because of importance of the theme to this unit, even though Glaspell is not a nineteenth-century writer.

From Glaspell we will move to a short selection from Lerner's The Female Experience entitled "The Life of an Illinois Farmer's Wife." Having worked very hard, the farm woman sneaks time to read while she is churning. However, she must hide her reading from her husband, who thinks it a timekiller. Next, we will read Arvazine Angeline Cooper, "Pioneer Across the Plains," in Eve Merriam, editor, Growing Up Female in America: Ten Lives (New York: Dell, 1971). The concluding novel will be Cather's My Antonia. Students will be asked to decide whether they think that toothless, weatherbeaten Antonia is indeed a romanticized "earthmother." They will also be asked to note the number of immigrant girls who do not marry after observing the examples of their own mothers and the difficulties of pioneer life in Nebraska. Possibilities for inclusion in this unit are the diary of Sarah Royce, the novel Giants of the Earth, and selections from Spoon River Anthology. Projects might include making a family work history, keeping a journal or writing letters as if one were a homesteader or a farm wife. Possibilities for a guest lecturer would include the professional historian or the authority on local history.

From local history we will move to personal history and begin the unit entitled "The Slave." Most students should be aware that teaching a slave to read or to write was illegal, but we will begin with emphasis on this fact. Thus, students should realize the importance of oral history. We will move to introductory material in Gerda Lerner's Black Woman in White America. After Lerner, we will read Ernest Gaines, The Diary of Miss Jane Pittman. Students should be made aware that this book illumines history; the historical accuracy of any book of this nature is questionable. (In his introduction, Gaines explains about interviewing Pittman and about her death within a short time.) Next we will move to Margaret Walker's Jubilee, an account of the Civil War and Reconstruction from the black woman's viewpoint.

Following the discussion of the slave, we will consider the Plantation Mistress. The romanticized myth of the southern heroine as exemplified in Scarlett O'Hara will be our beginning. Students, however, will be made aware from the outset that they are dealing with myth. (Reading Cash, The Mind of the South should prove enlightening. As additional myth-dispelling material students will read Anne F. Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930.) If available, selections from Mary Boykin Chesnut's diary will be effective at this point in the study of the southern lady (see notes in Scott, The Southern Lady for references to Chesnut.)

Next we will move to "Women in Industry." First we will read Louisa May Alcott's autobiographical novel Work. The heroine of Alcott's book encounters almost all the problems of the nineteenth-century working woman: she does both industrial and domestic work. Interested students should compare ideas on work in this book with those in Little Women. Attitudes toward career and marriage should be included with those toward work. For a picture of life in the Lowell Mills students will read Lucy Larcom, A New England Girlhood (Houghton Mifflin, 1889; reprinted in Nancy Cott, editor, Roots of Bitterness (Dutton, 1972). We will conclude the unit with Rebecca Harding Davis, Life in the Iron Mills. For projects, students will research conditions in various industries (e.g., sex-segregated jobs in the artificial flower making industry in which men were paid higher wages in jobs closed to women.) In researching current conditions, students might investigate the dispute over unionization in J. P. Stevens textile plants.

The nineteenth-century section of WOMEN AND WORK will conclude with "Women in the Professions: Law, Education, and Medicine." Students will read Chapter II, "An Historical Overview" in William H. Chafe, Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Chafe explains Gilman's ideas on economics and attitudes in

the nineteenth century toward the education of women. After discussing this essay, we will proceed to Lerner, The Female Experience, where we will read selections on Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D. and Ann Preston, M.D. Then we will move to Elizabeth Blackwell, Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches (New York: Schocken, 1977; reprint of 1895 ed). Additional reading will be on Dr. Anna Howard Shaw from Merriam, Growing Up Female in America. Students will read Maria Zakrzewska, A Woman' Quest (Appleton, Wisconsin, 1924), the story of a nineteenth-century Polish-American medical doctor. Moving to women in the law, students will read about Belva Lockwood in Signs and in Lerner's The Female Experience. For women in education students will read in The Female Experience the selection from Emma Willard, "A Plan for improving female education." Other selections will be Alma Lutz, Emma Willard: Pioneer Educator of American Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Student projects on this unit will involve research into the history of these professions and into the lives of women famous for their work in these fields. This work might be presented as a research paper or as an oral report. Students might role play and become famous women, or they could play "what's my line" and identify famous professional women from this century.

In examining occupational roles in the twentieth century, WOMEN AND WORK will follow the same plan used for the preceeding century. Students will begin with "Houseworker/Motherworker." From Sisterhood is Powerful we will read "The Politics of Housework" by Pat Mainardi. Then we will read a handout entitled "I Want a Wife." Students will read and discuss selections from The Female Experience: "Anything but housework" (1910); "Our feudal housewives (1938); "Collective bargaining for household technicians" (1975). Then we will move to Jessie Bernard, The Future of Motherhood, Chapter 7, "What Do You Mean, Work?" Here the value of motherwork is shown against the

value of industrial work. Also in Bernard's book we will read Chapter 11 entitled "The Other Half." Bernard's concern here is with the housewife. Literature for this section will include Marge Piercy's Small Changes, especially the story of Beth, who marries immediately after high school and finds that wife is synonomous with servant. Selections from Adrienne Rich's poetry will be included in this unit: "Shapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," "Dialogue," and "From an Old House in America." All students will be required to read Piercy's "The Bonsai Tree" so that they will see how women have been "pruned" to fit restrictive roles.

Next, we will turn to an examination of "Rural Women" because the hardships of rural and Appalachian women today correspond to the hardships of lives on the farm and frontier in the nineteenth century. Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, the story of a poor woman who becomes a successful dairy farmer, is one of the two required readings. The second reading is Kathy Kahn, Hillbilly Women (New York: Avon, 1974). This book consists of the transcripts of taped interviews with Appalachian or "hillbilly" women. Some of the women are housewives whose husbands work in the coal mines of Virginia or Kentucky; other women are factory workers themselves and describe their struggles to earn a living in the textile mills of Georgia and South Carolina. Students will read one selection from Lerner, The Female Experience: "How to live on forty-six cents a day: Anonymous Cotton Mill Worker (1929)." Also useful in this unit is Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Levine discusses folk songs and attitudes toward work expressed in them. A project could be the collecting of songs showing various attitudes toward work in the mill and the cotton field. Another project might be preparing a radio script of an interview with a "hillbilly" or keeping a journal showing "one day in the life of. . . ."

The primary text for the next section "Women in Industry" is America's Working Women: A Documentary History--1600 to the Present compiled and

edited by Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1976). (Although invididual selections have not been made, this book will be useful for nineteenth-century industrial workers and for rural working women.) The section entitled "Working-Class Power," pp. 167-182, includes such topics as "The A.F.L. View of Women Workers" and "Trade Union Workers." Other selections from this book are "Mothers in Overalls," "Shipyard Diary of a Woman Welder" by Augusta Clawson, "Protest to a Shop Steward" by Sarah Rozner, and "Working Women Respond to the Equal Rights Amendment" by Elizabeth Christman. In addition, students will read a selection from Sisterhood is Powerful entitled "Two Jobs: Women Who Work in Factories." Factory work is sometimes uninspiring, to say the least, but women in the work force must be aware that many factory jobs today pay well and are available to women. In fact, the production line can be a well paying substitute for the typewriter--if a woman prefers it. Projects for this unit might include the collection of newspaper clippings on women breaking through in non-traditional industrial fields. If material from local industry is available (it may not be), students might investigate and report to the class on jobs that were formerly "for women only" and that have now been reclassified in sex-neutral terms. There are numerous filmstrips available for use in secondary schools on non-traditional jobs for people.

Next we will move to a unit entitled "The Black Woman" in which we will use an excellent anthology of short stories, Mary Helen Washington, editor, Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories By and About Black Women (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975). After discussing Washington's introduction about the black woman's need to understand her past--historical and personal--as part of the search for identity of an oppressed people, we will move to several stories about working. In "Reena" the heroine, with her unused degree in journalism, finds herself in middle age beginning to work, finally, in her major field. Toni Cade in The Black Woman presents material

depicting both urban and rural blacks. Because I have found that students enjoy the poetry of Nikki Giovanni, they will read My House and Re:Creation, both available in paperback. Next, students will read part of Giovanni's autobiography Gemini, and then they will move to Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun. In this play, Walter's sister Beneatha wants to study medicine but is asked why she "can't just get married." Walter's wife works as a domestic, and Mama is the "head" of the family until she finally gives this onerous task to Walter so that he can become a "man." In this unit, students will be asked to write dialogues between various people, such as Nikki Giovanni, Walter, and Beneatha on an assigned subject such as the channeling of creativity in women. A suggested reading for this unit is Shirley Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed.

After the unit on black women, we will move to "Women in the Professions," which will begin with Chapter 8 in Jessie Bernard, Women and the Public Policy. Entitled "reconciling the incompatible functions of women," this chapter is on role sharing and on the work histories of professional women. Included are statistics on the number of children that professional women either do or do not have. Next, we will go to Chapter 9 in Bernard's book, "Women at the Professional Level," in which Bernard describes career patterning of these women. Then we will move to Bernard's The Future of Motherhood, Chapter 9, "The Professional Mother," by which Bernard means the professional as mother. Then we will move to an essay by Adrienne Rich entitled "When We Dead Awaken." Students will read Views from Women Achievers, published under the auspices of AT & T, where they will find selections on such women as Juanita Kreps and Elizabeth Duncan Koontz. In The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 8, 1977, Vol. XIV, No. 22, they will analyze the success of Adele Simmons, the recently named president of Hampshire College. In literature, students will read about women achievers: in academe there is Gail Godwin's The Odd Woman; in mathematics there is Miriam from Marge

Piercy's Small Changes. Projects here can range from statistical analyses of women in the professions, to research projects on women in professions, to critiques of novels dealing with the professional woman, to dialogues between various characters in these novels.

The concluding unit to WOMEN AND WORK is a combination of facts on how to get a job and what to do about discrimination when it is encountered on the job. Students will discuss two books on working that contain similar subject matter: Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Getting Yours: How to Make the System Work for the Working Woman (New York: David McKay Company, 1975); and Karin Abarbanel and Gonnie McClung Siegel, Woman's Work Book: How to Get Your First Job . . . How to Re-enter the Job Market . . . How to Fight for Your Rights in the Work World . . . and More (New York: Praeger, 1975).

In this concluding unit we will move from a pragmatic approach to work to a progmatic approach to women and the law. The text here will be Leo Kanowitz, Women and the Law: The Unfinished Revolution (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969). We will use the Casebook Supplement to the Kanowitz book because reading sexist legal decisions should be enlightening for students. After reading Kanowitz, students will learn about their rights as workers by discussing The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as Amended and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as Amended. In concluding this unit, students will discuss the Equal Rights Amendment: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Students will read and discuss the section of the Equal Rights Amendment in Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, Rebirth of Feminism (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1971). The authors discuss common misconceptions about the ERA. Student projects might include listening to guest lecturers, such as

women lawyers and state legislators, and then writing analyses of their comments on the legal status of women. Students might also set up a debate or panel discussion on the relative merits of the ERA, with emphasis on differences that ERA will make for workers. A discussion of the Equal Rights Amendment is an appropriate conclusion to the course WOMEN AND WORK IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA.